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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001819

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10-20-13

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [SOCI](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: Maldivian President wins another five-year term in office

Refs: Colombo 1718, and previous

(U) Classified by Bruce Lohof, Acting Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Maldivian President Gayoom handily won reelection for a sixth term in a national referendum held on October 17. In other local political developments, the government continues to investigate the causes of the rare outbreak of unrest last month. Although he won the referendum in a predictably easy manner, Gayoom's sixth term may be a challenging one given the recent bubbling up of discontent. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) GAYOOM WINS AGAIN: Maldivian President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom easily won re-election to another five-year term in a national referendum held on October 17 (he has been in power since 1978). According to official figures released on October 20, the final count in the "yes/no" referendum was 90.28 percent in favor of Gayoom, with 9.72 percent against. Gayoom's victory in the referendum follows his selection by the People's Majlis (Parliament) in September as the country's lone presidential candidate. His inauguration for a sixth term is set to take place in early November.

3. (SBU) By way of context, Gayoom's margin of victory was slightly lower than the 1998 election in which he won 90.9 percent of the vote. In his previous elections (1993, 1988, 1983, 1978), he also won sizable majorities in the presidential referendums. Interestingly, given the recent unrest there (see below), Gayoom suffered a nearly 12 percent drop in "yes" votes in the capital of Male'. Voter turnout was reported at 77 percent, marginally higher than the 76.7 percent reported in the 1998 election. Over 113,000 people voted (out of a total population of roughly 270,000).

4. (SBU) GOVERNMENT PROBE INTO UNREST: In other local political developments, the government continues to investigate the causes of the rare outbreak of unrest last month in Male' which was sparked by a police firing at a prison on a nearby island (see Reftels). A Presidential Commission set up to investigate the September 19 prison disturbance gave a press briefing on October 16 reviewing its work thus far (there is another Commission investigating the September 20 riots on Male'). In the briefing, Abdul Sattar Moosa Didi, the head of the Commission, provided details on the death of an inmate at the prison, which set off a riot by the prisoners, and led to the police firing that left three other prisoners dead and several wounded. On the basis of Didi's comments, the Commission seems to have tentatively concluded that the inmate in question died of unspecified mistreatment by prison guards. Didi noted, for example, that Adam Mohamed, formerly a National Security Service captain at the prison, had been correctly held responsible for the incident and cashiered from police service. Based on what Mission understands, up to twelve NSS personnel, including Mohamed, have been fired for their role in the prison disturbance. Didi wrapped up by noting that the Commission's investigation would continue.

5. (C) RSO recently visited Male', and in comments providing further insight into the unrest, was told by Controller of Immigration and Emigration Ali Hussain Didi that Maldivians had been stunned by the police firings at the prison. Given their long-standing cultural aversion to violence, some Maldivians had had a sharp, intense reaction to the NSS' use of force against the prisoners and had taken to the streets in protest. Didi said he thought the worst was over now, with most Maldivians accepting the government's claims that it was earnestly trying to get to the bottom of what happened.

6. (C) COMMENT: Despite the recent unrest, Gayoom was widely expected to win the referendum and the results are already being paraded by the government as evidence of the depth of his public support. As to the free and fair nature of the process itself, we do not think the process was "fair" given that only one candidate is

allowed to seek a popular mandate and no political parties are allowed. Conversely, the process -- when taken on its own merits -- seems to have been "free" enough in that we have not heard any substantiated reports of ballot stuffing or pressure on voters. Given the recent bubbling up of discontent, our guess is that Gayoom's sixth term may be a challenging one as he deals with growing pressure from the public for a more open political system. END COMMENT.

17. (U) Minimize considered.

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